



Reservoir Water Released to Benefit Fishery

Despite the year 2000 being mostly a wet one, unscheduled releases were made from New York City's three in-basin water supply reservoirs to benefit the Delaware's headwaters fishery.

Near the end of the summer a decision was made by the commission, New York City, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to use the remaining quantity of water in the reservoirs' "thermal stress bank" to bolster flows along the West Branch of the Delaware. The water was released into the stream despite water temperatures that remained below 75 degrees Fahrenheit.

Under the commission's drought operating plan, the 75-degree reading is the threshold for tapping the bank of chilly reservoir water, which when released into the river system benefits a world class trout fishery. But because of the ample amounts of rain that fell during the spring and summer, only minimal amounts of non-banked water, or "directed releases," were needed to meet a downstream flow target at Montague, N. J. of 1,750 cubic feet per second (cfs), another component of the operating plan.

With less water coming out of the impoundments, flows in the West Branch were greatly reduced putting the cold water fishery at risk. The thermal stress bank releases ended on October 31, 2000.

The year 2000 bore out the old bromide that normal weather is simply the average of extremes.

Heavy snowpack surrounding the reservoirs, located in New York's Catskill Mountains, began to thaw in late February and by early March storage levels were above normal. By late April, the reservoirs were full, holding 271 billion gallons (bg) of useable water. Abundant rainfall kept the reservoirs at or close to their full capacity until July 1.

Below normal precipitation occurred during the fall, however, with some October readings at near record lows. Streamflows continued to drop off until mid-December when a storm dumped up to four inches of rain in some portions of the basin. Streamflows rebounded with readings at Montague and Trenton at their highest levels since September 1999 when Hurricane Floyd battered the basin.